**Scientific Name**
Terrapene ornata, Terrapene carolina

**Other Names**
None

**Range**
Southern South Dakota, Iowa and western Illinois, south to Louisiana and Texas, west to southwestern Arizona; separate population in northwestern Indiana and adjacent Illinois

**Habitat**
Open prairies, grazed pasture lands, open woodlands and marshy meadows

**Average Size**
Length: 4 – 6 in.
Weight: 300 – 600 g.

**Description**
Male: Small, land turtle with a high domed top shell (carapace), a concave, hinged lower shell (plastron) that is able to close almost completely, reddish iris color
Female: Smaller than the male with yellowish-brown eyes and a flat plastron

**Lifespan**
In the wild: 25 years
In captivity: 25 – 50 years

**Diet**
In the wild: Insects, berries, fruit, fungi, amphibians and eggs
In captivity: Worms and mixed vegetables and fruit

**Offspring**
3 to 8 eggs

**Incubation**
90 days

**Sexual Maturity**
7 to 10 years of age

**Predators**
Skunk, bobcat, fox, raptors, crows, ravens and snakes

**Population Status**
Vulnerable

**Behavior**
These diurnal, terrestrial turtles spend most of the daylight hours searching for food and sunning themselves on exposed rocks. They are omnivores, with the young eating mostly insects and the mature turtles eating primarily plants. Although not deemed social, they have small home ranges of 750 feet that overlap those of other Box turtles and show little or no aggression towards their neighbors.

Like many reptiles, environmental temperature determines the activity rate for Box turtles. When it gets too hot, they hide under decaying leaves, move into an abandoned mammal burrow or seek shelter in shallow water ways. When the temperature gets too cold, they hibernate for up to six months under ground. In northern climates, Box turtles begin hibernation in October or November, but in the south they can be active year-round.

**Reproduction and Breeding**
The mating season for Box turtles begins in spring and may continue throughout summer into fall. Males may mate with one or several females over the season and over a period of years. The specific courtship and mating rituals vary greatly amongst the Box turtle subspecies. Preliminary behaviors include biting, circling, pulsation of throats and shoving.

Once the eggs are laid in the nest, dug in sandy soil solely by the female, neither parent plays a role with the offspring. The female may lay several clutches each year, with incubation varying seasonally based on soil temperature and moisture level.

Because the hatchlings are so vulnerable to predators, they spend the first few years concealed under leaf litter and feed primarily on small insects. When they reach breeding age, it is thought that Box turtles return to the place of their birth to lay their clutches.

**Conservation**
Box turtles are still relatively common throughout most of their range, but their slow growth rate and delayed sexual maturity leaves them particularly susceptible to damage from human activities. Although a female will lay hundreds of eggs in her lifetime, only a handful will survive to adulthood. These offspring are barely enough to replace their parents under perfect conditions. Fragmentation and loss of habitat have divided populations,
making it increasingly difficult for individuals to find food and mates. Isolated populations suffer from inbreeding and other genetic problems.

Another great concern for this species is the pet trade. When viable adults are taken from the wild for household pets the birth rate drops significantly. The Sacramento Zoo encourages future pet owners to look for captive bred animals that have not been taken from the wild.

When their remaining habitat borders high traffic areas, many Box turtles are accidentally killed by cars, trains, lawn mowers and tractors.

**Amazing Facts**

There are four species and numerous sub-species of Box turtle.

Box turtles are able to eat toxic plants and mushrooms that could kill a human.

Their shell is regenerative and can often survive severe damage.